

## **Rabies: FAQ's**

### **What is rabies?**

Rabies is a virus, typically transmitted to one animal from the bite (saliva) of a rabid animal. Most rabies cases reported to the CDC each year are from wild animals including raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes. Domestic animals are also susceptible, but these cases account for fewer than 10% of reported cases in the United States. Rabies affects the central nervous system, eventually leading to death.

### **How is rabies transmitted?**

1. Raccoon is bitten by a rabid animal.
2. Rabies virus enters the raccoon through infected saliva.
3. Rabies virus spreads through the nerves to the spinal cord and brain.
4. The virus incubates in the raccoon's body for approximately 3-12 weeks. The raccoon has no signs of illness during this time.
5. When it reaches the brain, the virus multiplies rapidly, passes to the salivary glands, and the raccoon begins to show signs of the disease.
6. 6. The infected animal usually dies within 7 days of becoming sick.

*Transmittal information courtesy of the CDC.*

### **What are the signs and symptoms of rabies and who are carriers?**

Rabies is transmitted by mammals, so on Bald Head Island the most common carriers of rabies would be raccoons, red foxes, gray foxes and bats. Although deer and rodents could carry rabies, they are much less likely to be carriers of the virus. It can often take weeks or even months for the first symptoms of rabies to appear in wild animals after they have been bitten by a rabid animal. A wide variety of symptoms can occur, including a loss of fear of humans, difficulty walking, erratic behavior, aggressive behavior, biting of inanimate objects or the appearance of choking or trouble with its mouth, paralysis and foaming of the mouth.

### **What can you do?**

First and foremost, keep your distance from any wild animal – you can never be sure how they will react to your presence. Second, if you see island mammals, especially raccoons and foxes, displaying any of the typical symptoms of rabies please call the Village Police Department (910.457.5252) and the BHI Conservancy (910.457.0089) to report the location, kind of animal and behavior. Third, keep your pets on a leash and be sure they are up to date with their rabies vaccinations. It is important to remember that it is not uncommon to see red foxes and raccoons during the day on BHI. They have become accustomed to humans, especially those that have been fed, and simply seeing them during the day does not mean they are rabid.